

## **My way with Dean & Doreen Elefthery**

### **Out of the wilderness**

Procedures, rules, structures, inevitable steps, interpretations, surprises, so called creativity, and warnings for dangers were the ingredients I was confronted with in my early psychodrama training in the U.S. in the late seventies. Those trainings were mostly given in psychotherapeutic settings. The sessions were mainly directed towards instant change and emotional effects. There should be a maximum of acting out, always in search of short cuts to a catharsis momentum.

### **Dean & Doreen: a relief**

Two human beings who showed me how they themselves were the instrument for learning. In the beginning I didn't even realize they had a theoretical frame work at all. They just talked and acted with us. They were so reliable, that we unconcerned answered their questions, followed their suggestions or also sometimes might resist them and look for another way.

### **Possible?**

Dean and Doreen recreated continuously a Gestalt of psychodrama, basically similar, but dancing and heaving with the waves of what the protagonist was researching and trying to figure out. No hurry, no scoring, only offering possibilities, looking for ways and helping to name every step forward, to appreciate it and to get it landed.

### **You are psychodrama**

Dean and Doreen didn't stress on theory. Psychodrama was in them. They embodied psychodrama, and we had to deal with that. An always originally modulated repetition brought us the print of what it could be. Psychodrama invaded me and nested in a way that linked up with my life. D&D gave guidance to that process.

### **Trust the process**

Everyone discovered his own moment: now I can try to do it! Everyone did it his own way. And that was O.K.. It always differed from what Dean & Doreen did. On one hand because of the fact they weren't imitable and they didn't want us to do so anyway ("Don't try to become me!"); on the other hand they had a didactic approach, that appealed to the very best in oneself as a result of own genetics or history. So they followed the form that the person suited and in his own pace.

### **Just winners**

It didn't matter at all, that trainee A. in certain aspects made more progress than B.. We weren't classes educated towards a uniform examination. Dean and Doreen gave everyone of us the feeling, that we made progress and that you could trust yourself. They showed their joy when you did so.

### **Psychodramatic family**

Rivalry between the trainees was not an issue and was discouraged. D&D's respect for everyone of us affected the group. This was no place for competition. The protagonist, the practicing director and co, the group members with their engagement, had continuously Dean and Doreen's attention. And we as participants got infected by that attitude.

### **Gentle**

Dean was the leader. That seemed evident. He structured the session, always checking on the protagonist's well being. However, as to the content, there was the subtle powerful steering from Doreen as the co-director. Her doubling showed the way for both the protagonist and for Dean. Her doubling ( ideas, feelings, ordering, chances, reflections, confrontations) came as chiming in the ears and hearts of the protagonists. At the beginning a resonance, then you repeat the words, finally the recognition and identification ("put it in your own words").

Dean was a blessed man, having such an adequate and affectionate co-director. Dean's leadership could stay gentle. It got the colour from Doreen's doubling action. Their cooperation was gentle, the direction was gentle, the doubles were gentle: who was the leader anyway? Did it matter? The protagonist always had the feeling being able to keep in control. That was what really counted for D&D.

### **Embracing not smothering**

As a protagonist and particularly as a beginning director I experienced I could work and practice safely. My interventions received appreciation, although lots of alternatives appeared to be possible! My own performances as a director were provided with supplementary input, mostly enriching and stimulating to daring, but also to modesty, and certainly to care for my protagonist. I still hear Dean saying: "Ama, et fac quod vis", love them and do what you want, quoting Augustinus in a psychodramatic setting. He tried to point out a principle of leadership that ascended above all forms of show and scoring.

With the same arms he could embrace you, he could keep you at a distance and provide with feedback and learning moments.

Dean and Doreen's embraces were life giving, never smothering: on your own feet and please, move on!

### **Differences and choices**

Fortunately I have seen many ways of conducting psychodrama. I have made my choice and I don't see how it ever could change. I never felt and saw a nicer approach to the method and a better execution of it, as I received from the Elefthery's. Also the manner they transferred their richness to their trainees is unique.

I sum up with respect some of the elements:

working as a couple; clearly functioning in the director's role and in the co-director's; gently following the flow of the protagonist; always predictable for the client so far as method and rules are concerned; alertness on group dynamics; a recognizable and flexible structure; playing with closeness and distance; caring and loving without making dependent; stimulating everyone to follow their own strengths, and last but not least always trying to reconcile people and opinions rather than imposing prescriptions.

Hopefully I can pass on those gifts to the next psychodrama generation.

**Jan Lap, april 2008**